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THE POETRY OF CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

Charles-Pierre Baudelaire was born in Paris in 1821. His early formed resolve to become a man of letters was displeasing to his family; they designed him for commerce, and in the hope of distracting him from his purpose, sent him on a voyage to the East. He visited Mauritius, La Réunion, Madagascar, Ceylon, and the Peninsula of the Ganges, returning to France after an absence of ten months. The effort to interest him in commerce was vain; "de ce voyage au long cours," says Gautier, "il ne rapporta qu'un éblouissement splendide qu'il garda toute sa vie."

In 1843 Baudelaire received his patrimony of some 75,000 francs, and could take up literature in earnest. Establishing himself at Paris, he made his debut in letters with a volume of art criticism, *Salon de 1845*. He also contributed prose and verse to some of the journals of the day. In 1846 appeared a second volume of critiques, *Salon de 1846*. Upon the cover of this volume announcement was made of *Les Fleurs du Mal* under the title *Les Limbes*, and of two other works that never appeared. About this time Baudelaire's interest in Poe was awakened, and in Poe he found a kindred spirit and literary affinity. Amorphous translations of some of Poe's work had already appeared; Baudelaire undertook an adequate rendition. His translations appeared in various journals and were published collectively in 1875.

Baudelaire's sole volume of verse, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, was published in 1857. Its first reception was hostile; the poet and his publisher were fined and were ordered to suppress portions of the book. Baudelaire never forgot this exhibition of philistinism. His unsuccessful candidacy in 1862 for election to the French Academy was, it has been suggested, by way of protest against his condemnation.

Toward the close of his life Baudelaire left Paris for Brussels in the vain hope that the change of scene would benefit his failing health. There he was stricken with paralysis; brought back to Paris by friends, he lingered a few months and died in 1867.

Aside from the works already mentioned, Baudelaire published little else. There was an account of the Salon of 1859 entitled *La morale du joujou. Les paradis artificiels* (1861) deals with hashish and opium, being in part an exposition and commentary of De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*. His *Petits poèmes en prose*, a collection of the prose poems published at various times, appeared in the complete edition of his works published in 1890.

From any standpoint, whether the artistic, the ethical, the psychological, Baudelaire is a personage of compelling interest. So complex is his personality that to gain a thoroughgoing understanding of his work it would be necessary to consider him minutely from all points of view. Accordingly, any treatment of him within the limits set here cannot be expected to be exhaustive. We shall try especially to project his personality as a poet.

Obviously, Baudelaire is a man apart in French literature. Intensely individual, he can be assigned to the ranks of no single school. He has certain affinities with the Romantic poets, and like the Parnassians his doctrine was "l'art pour l'art." As in the Parnassians, the life of the times finds in him small reflection and artistic expression. But whereas the leaders of the school withdrew to remoter regions in time or space, Baudelaire's withdrawal is within himself, for exploration and exploitation of his own ego. Personally, all the manifestations of the day,—political, social, intellectual,—he scorns. He has a horror of philanthropy and humanitarianism, and after 1848 the very idea of progress is grotesque to him, as it is a sure sign of decadence, or as he says: "une lanterne qui jette des ténèbres sur tous les objets de la connaissance." And so, like Leconte de Lisle, he hates steam and electricity in that these will never be fit for poetic representation. Thoroughly in sympathy with the disinterestedness that distinguished the Romanticists of 1830, he later regrets to be living in an age preëminently utilitarian after "le Coucher du Soleil romantique." With all the younger poets of his time he bitterly denounces "la critique et l'art bourgeois," the former especially represented by all the leading academic reviews of the day. Outward activity in any form he intentionally avoids

as a source of later regrets. Man, in his opinion, should take example from the owls, the personification of stillness, the birds dear to Minerva :—

Leur attitude au sage enseigne
Qu'il faut en ce monde qu'il craigne
Le tumulte et le mouvement ;

L'homme ivre d'une ombre qui passe
Porte toujours le châtiment
D'avoir voulu changer de place.

His persistent indifference to contemporary life turns the poet away more particularly from the artistic tendencies of the majority, and urges him to "se tailler une maison," as Amiel says, in the midst of the modern world, and there in seclusion he works out in patient endeavor the sombre message of his originality. Baudelaire's poetry no less than his criticism is indeed in striking contrast with the current of his time. And this contrast is surely heightened by a stubborn determination to attain originality at all costs. In form no less than in content he avoids improvisation, partly because of insufficient inspiration, it is true, but also because he knows that improvisation usually excludes originality. Hence an effort must be made to overcome the temptation of the commonplace theme and to discard the specious effects of form that are, as a rule, appreciated by the average man. One must see the object intended for representation in such a way as to discover in it something that others have failed to observe and express. The poet must then bring out by a process of careful meditation the hidden originality that is more or less in a potential state in every one, but that the force of tradition or of influence of environment usually offsets. Thus, the admiration of Baudelaire for Poe is readily explained. Poe understood that "l'originalité est chose d'apprentissage, ce qui ne veut pas dire une chose qui peut être transmise par l'enseignement," as we read in Gautier's preface to Baudelaire's volume of verse. To keep aloof from what is normal and common is, therefore, an æsthetic necessity, and the truly original artist will show in his work intensity of effect, search for what is rare, and power of invention. Baudelaire will consistently seek into the unexplored, and project artistically the

slightest strangeness that may be suggested under the form of usual objects. He delights, therefore, in the representation of singular and striking traits, even though the taste of the public may be shocked thereby. His fondness for whatever presents a characteristic of eccentricity explains his saying that "le beau est toujours bizarre." And since this element of the bizarre constitutes the real mark of genuine individuality, he readily accepts a complete submission to it:—

Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cerveau,
Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe?
Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau!

It matters little that such originality may alienate those for whom the common alone is what maintains the *juste milieu* of any endeavor. The poet does not work to secure the largest appreciation possible; he is not seeking universal favor; a circle of admiring friends will suffice. The poet will strive to his end without concern for what is contingent. And Baudelaire goes even further than he probably intended, for he often gives the impression of purposely trying to shock the reader. He does not hesitate to make his own all the exceptional pathological states, knowing that he will thus harass the sensibility of the average reader. Strange fears, hallucinations, exalted sensuality, all the moods that a powerful and keen imagination can heighten, will be welcomed as subject-matter for poetic representation. These are the themes that Baudelaire, like Poe, cherishes, although he rarely seeks in them the awe-inspiring effects often found in the work of his American confrère. The exceptional, nay, the unreal, as it were, both in nature and art haunts Baudelaire, but we realize that although such an attitude was largely due to his inner self, other reasons were also responsible for it, especially his desire to take his personality away from the banality of the day and from the creed in art which characterizes the flock. This fact should not be underestimated, for it helps sufficiently to explain that artistic temperament far more than any moral weakness urged the poet in this direction. Théodore de Banville tells us that Baudelaire's mania for originality frequently shocked even his associates: "il ne disait rien qui ne fût le contraire d'un lieu commun." Now it is reasonable to

infer that Baudelaire's cult of the artificial being preëminent not only as an element of form but as an essential of thought also, nature will find little echo in his art; for nothing is so beautiful in nature that art cannot improve by lending it a more convincing charm. And so even when the gorgeous landscapes of the Orient are poetically evoked, it is not so much the wealth of colors or the strange, luxuriant vegetation that is foremost in appeal. Indeed, he was apparently indifferent to the scenery of the Orient and it has been said that during his voyage to the East he spent his time reading Balzac. The appeal really consists in the fugitive impressions which stir the monotonous and languid temperament of the poet. He remembers to paint the nostalgia of Oriental lands where his indolent spirit found rest and his ennui sensual distraction; the lands evoked in his beautiful sonnet *La vie antérieure*:—

C'est là que j'ai vécu dans les voluptés calmes,
Au milieu de l'azur, des vagues, des splendeurs
Et des esclaves nus, tout imprégnés d'odeurs,

Qui me rafraîchissaient le front avec des palmes,
Et dont l'unique soin était d'approfondir
Le secret douloureux qui me faisait languir.

Like Poe he believes that the one object of poetry is the rhythmic creation of the beautiful; and so, even though he may often be pretentiously shocking, Baudelaire is rather unconcerned morally. Like other poets of the post-Romantic period, he shows a certain tendency to follow the principle expressed by Taine: "l'artiste n'a pour but que de produire le beau; le changer en prédicateur, c'est le détruire. Il n'y a plus d'art, dès que l'art devient un instrument de pédagogie." And in Baudelaire's own words: "je dis que, si le poète a poursuivi un but moral, il a diminué sa force poétique, et il n'est pas imprudent de parier que son œuvre sera mauvaise. La poésie ne peut pas, sous peine de mort ou de déchéance, s'assimiler à la science ou à la morale. Elle n'a pas la Vérité pour objet, elle n'a qu'Elle-même." In his opinion true art cannot be immoral, for the attainment of the really beautiful is inconsistent with immorality. The artist is not necessarily indifferent to the spectacle of vice simply because he does not openly condemn it

in his work, but he will surely find vice offensive to his æsthetic temperament: "ce qui exaspère surtout l'homme de goût dans le spectacle du vice, c'est sa difformité, sa disproportion. . . ." It is, in other words, an abhorrence of vice based on merely æsthetic preoccupation. Baudelaire may say that "le vice porte atteinte au Juste et au Vrai, révolte l'intellect et la conscience," but he also hastens to add that "comme outrage à l'harmonie, comme dissonance, il blessa plus particulièrement certains esprits poétiques," and he finally considers "toute infraction à la morale, au beau moral, comme une espèce de faute contre le rythme et la prosodie universels." Now this attitude of the poet is seemingly inconsistent with no small part of his poetry, in that the latter sounds a note that is often discordant with what we believe to be a delicate æsthetic sense. The chasm between the critic and the poet is on this particular point so wide that bridging it is scarcely possible. As a fitting comment to his *Fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire might have assumed the position of Goethe to the effect that mental nourishment should not be sought only in what is exclusively pure and moral, for all that is great artistically contributes to one's education. And we feel that there is a secret efficacy in Baudelaire's portrayal of vice, for it shows in a most vivid manner the bitter disappointment of both mind and body that ultimately accompanies it. The poet may purposely avoid the expression of any direct inference or conclusion, and solely bind his interest to the tableau, but the intelligent reader will not fail, in the long run, to understand the lesson that the poet teaches in spite of himself.

There is an ethical side of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Baudelaire is a preacher by indirection. The opening lines of the book are :—

La sottise, l'erreur, le péché, la lésine,
Occupent nos esprits et travaillent nos corps.

As a whole one might consider *Les Fleurs du Mal* as an exposition by illustration of the doctrine of original sin, of the deceit and desperate wickedness of the human heart, of the universal perversity which spiritual exasperation suggests to him and which he thought to be characteristic of the purest souls. To

Baudelaire the trier of men's souls, the Tempter, is as real a person as he was to Job—

C'est le Diable qui tient les fils qui nous remuent !

Men are puppets in the hands of evil, playing their despicable parts in the drama of darkness ; "l'essaim de mauvais anges" is always round about. The indifference of the human heart descending toward the Infernal without horror and the hypocrisy of men, his brothers ; these it is that move him to speak. Painting with a brush dipped in Erebus, he attempts, by vividness of delineation, to awaken men from their spiritual lethargy, for before any change may come, there must be a realization of their terrible condition. One vice he considers worst of all, Ennui, because it is the sum of perversity, of dissatisfaction, of denial,—of abdication of will, which in man is the most divine, Godlike possession, in man the creative essence.

The personal note is never absent from the utterance. You are my brother, "mon semblable," he says to each one of his readers ; your hypocrisy is mine. And since the voice is one speaking in the midst of men and not from above men, the message is more convincing. The sermon is to all men, including the poet himself. The poet himself has sounded all depths ; his soul has walked in the penumbral places of earth, the innumerable valleys of shadow, has wandered on the verge of the gulf, so that he cries out desperately :—

Ah ! Seigneur ! donnez-moi la force et le courage
De contempler mon cœur et mon corps sans dégoût !

Death, the wages of sin, is a living presence in the poetry of Baudelaire. Mankind moves in a "danse macabre." Death is always riding through the landscape as in Böcklin's painting. The poet's vision of death is almost material ; his vision is fixed on the physical aspects of death, the accompaniments of the epic of dissolution. And though the poet may apparently sound sometimes a note of joyous resignation to the fatality of this most hideous of physiological laws, as when he says—

O vers ! noirs compagnons sans oreilles et sans yeux,
Voyez venir à vous un homme libre et joyeux,—

one readily sees the artificiality hidden in so much boldness. Villon's mediæval vision of the horrors of death in not more vivid than Baudelaire's.

Confession and exhortation, dark portrayal and expressions of shining aspirations, alternate. The poet dissects his own personality and displays it as an example of warning or of emulation. Remorse and regret are his constant companions; grief for the irreparable is present always :—

L'irréparable ronge avec sa dent maudite ;—

the yellow serpent of Warning, *memento mori*, is always enthroned in his heart. Grief even becomes dear, since continued grief means continual repentance.

If the true purport of the book was an ethical one, what a hurt to the poet's soul its reception must have been. Having a message to give, nothing could have been worse than to have the message misunderstood, than to have just the reverse of the intended meaning put into it. Possibly the poet saw afterwards that his message could not have been universal. Such a thought seems to be expressed in the poem *Épigraphe pour un livre condamné*, wherein he says to the "lecteur paisible et bucolique," "sobre et naïf homme de bien"—

Jette ce livre saturnien,
Orgiaque et mélancolique.

Jette ! tu n'y comprendrais rien,
Ou tu me croirais hystérique.—

The message is to him who has sounded the depths, to the inquiring, curious, and suffering soul. To any such a soul he says :—

Ame curieuse, qui souffres
Et vas cherchant ton paradis,
Plains-moi ! . . . Sinon, je te maudis !

His condemnation is not for those incapable of understanding, but for those who do not, though they are capable.

As a matter of course Baudelaire's pessimism finds vent in his work. Spiritually, Baudelaire's life was one of bitter monotony, a perpetual spleen but seldom interrupted by a sort of spasmodic fancy :—

Une oasis d'horreur dans un désert d'ennui,—

as he says. Baudelaire's pessimism is a pessimism like that of Leconte de Lisle, differentiated, of course, by individual flavor. Leconte de Lisle's pessimism was the result of an evolution; Baudelaire's pessimism was innate, congenital. One element in Leconte de Lisle's pessimism is furnished by his denial of the hope of immortality; Baudelaire is a believer, his pessimism is that of a believer, is like that of Ecclesiasticus. In his expression of his pessimism Baudelaire does not show the restraint of Leconte de Lisle; he is not a stoic, like de Vigny. Toward the body—the physical part of man—his attitude is that which is peculiarly Christian—the body is something to be subdued, something to be kept under, something to be looked down upon with scorn, being the seat of human depravity. With him is always regret, remorse for the past—and these accentuate the gloom of any present moment, form a large part of the shades of the prison house. With other poets of his time pessimism may result from various and complex causes having some relation with external influences so that it may be partly mitigated and condoned. With Baudelaire, on the contrary, pessimism is continually fostered by mental concern and by a feeble will that never know victory.

Pervading it all was a poignant egotism; not material, however, for Baudelaire's generosity was always responsive, but rather spiritual, a certain assumption and blind confidence in the superior attainments of his intellect. This egotism, in spite of sporadic exceptions, is especially evident in the poet's conception of love. Sentimentality, even of the highest type, is, of course, absent from his verse. Baudelaire thought that eyes had shed too many tears in the flourishing days of Romanticism, and the heart had been too often the prey of passion. In this belief he anticipated the Parnassians whose attitude was later expressed by Verlaine in his *Épilogue*. Yet, Baudelaire's attitude toward passion as a source of poetic inspiration is much more than mere indifference, it is one of almost cynical contempt. And here again he was primarily moved by artistic preoccupation: "les singes du sentiment," he said, "sont en général de mauvais artistes." Through what he believes to be superior enlightenment Baudelaire is urged to expect and ask

nothing of woman but sensual or æsthetic satisfaction. She must be kept under, and true love, which obviously implies blind devotion and total surrender of one's self, must be avoided. Woman may indeed become a useful means to stir and enrich the imagination, but the poet's heart must be closed to her and she should not be allowed to dim his mental faculties. We must, however, be grateful to Baudelaire for his casual forgetfulness of this essentially animal attitude and rejoice that at intervals his heart was softened by a breath of pure ideality; that the gloomy atmosphere in which the evil flowers of his imagination thrive was more than once rent by a luminous sun-beam; that woman elicited during the oppressive moments of physical dejection and mental anguish some of the most ethereal and most enduring harmonies of his song.

It now remains for us to consider in its salient characteristics the metrical composition of Baudelaire's poetic content.

At the beginning of his career the poet formed an intimacy with Théodore de Banville. In matters of prosody he followed de Banville and the Romantic school. One of de Banville's cardinal principles was that rhymes should be as rich as possible. The rhyming syllables should, he said, contain the same consonant sounds as well as vowel sounds, as *médit—crédit, pauvreté—beauté*. Further, at this time rhyme was considered the one essential element in poetry,—

Rime, l'unique harmonie
Du vers, qui, sans tes accents
Frémissements
Serait muet au génie. . . .

As the richness of a particular rhyme increases, the number of possible combinations rapidly diminishes. Cassagne in his masterly thesis, *Versification et Métrique de Charles Baudelaire*, illustrates this by the following example: given the word *havane*, to find three other words rhyming with it; if the rhyme is to be determined by *ane* merely, about one hundred and sixty words will be at the versifier's disposal; if the rich rhyme *vane* is demanded, there is choice of only seven words, and if the ultra rich rhyme *avane* is essential, only three words meet the requirement, *caravane, savane, pavane*. It is evident, then, that

as a result of Baudelaire's adherence to the rule of the *rime richissime*, one is likely to get an erroneous impression of his ability in handling rhyme. Certainly his was not the mastery possessed by several other French poets, de Banville, Gautier, Heredia, and others. Baudelaire's working vocabulary was limited, notwithstanding his *lexicomania*. Cassagne states that in all the poetry of Baudelaire only one rare word occurs, namely, *calenture*, in the poem CIX of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Poetic composition was a task for Baudelaire. He seems to have been haunted always by the difficulty of binding his thought to the necessity of rhyme, as he intimates:—

Je vais m'exercer seul à ma fantasque escrime
Flairant dans tous les coins les hasards de la rime.

The same search for novelty which characterizes his poetic content appears also in his technique. Independent and indocile by nature, though he followed accepted canons as closely as he could, his aspiration was toward a form and method less rigorous and restraining, an aspiration that Gautier expresses by saying: "son vers étreint les objets plutôt comme une armure que comme un vêtement." The thought wears the vesture of verse, not as a covering worn unconsciously but as a rigid investiture which thought would, if possible, put aside for something more pliant. What Baudelaire sought for was a form which should have the freedom of prose and the elements of beauty of pure poetry. His *Petits poèmes en prose* was an attempt in this direction. Most so-called prose-poems are an abomination; they give one the impression of being the *dernier ressort* of one who can write neither prose nor verse. But Baudelaire's prose-poems are quite otherwise. They form great part of his title to a worthy originality. Like Poe, Baudelaire's contention was that in art there is method, and deliberate method, that inspiration is always to be subject to will, so that artistic creation is a sort of experimentation. This somewhat resembles the Parnassian doctrine of Leconte de Lisle who would keep inspiration always in subjection to the intellectual powers. But with Baudelaire inspiration was to be sent along a predetermined path; with the Parnassians, inspiration was to be kept within reasonable bounds. Ultimately, then, Baudelaire would deprive

inspiration of any spontaneity save the initiatory; with the Parnassians inspiration is chastened; its wings are only partly clipped. One feels, however, that neither Baudelaire nor Poe consistently avoided spontaneity of inspiration, and that possibly their explanation of the evolution of a poem is mere pretence, and also that the pretence may be a cloak for infirmity.

Baudelaire's use of assonance and alliteration was skilful, but the fact that he made use of these devices is not ground for claim to originality; they appear in all French poets before Baudelaire. Only his use of assonance and alliteration is possibly more frequent than in other poets, is carried further than they carried it. And herein we have one of Baudelaire's contributions in the movement toward freer verse in French.

There is one device Baudelaire makes peculiarly his own, that is the refrain or repetend. There are certain fixed forms or poetic compositions employed by the Pleiad more particularly, lost to view, and revived again by de Banville, in which repetition occurs. In the triolet, rondeau, villanelle, ballade, repetition is employed, but in an ordered and regular way. Baudelaire breaks with regularity and uses the refrain with freedom and variety emulating Poe—and one may add, as with Poe, the effect is sometimes one of exacerbation. Repetition, with Baudelaire, is usually something more than a simple rhetorical device. He uses it by way of parallelism, with cumulative effect, with subtle or slight variations in form to correspond to the changing color or development of thought. There may be a multiplicity of repetends, *leitmotiven* of thought developed in parallel or contrapuntally; there may be in his verse the effect as of different voices singing in recitative against a background of verse-accompaniment; there may be stretches of prosaism introduced into the poetic harmony, producing by resolution of their discords enhancement of verse-music, or giving the effect a momentary interruption of progressive harmonic development. One might say that for verse instrumentation Baudelaire did what his countryman Berlioz did for orchestral music. He was the pioneer, and not the creator of a new metrical system. A pioneer, he had the will to do, but was restricted in the means of doing; his outfit was scanty. His disciples, notably Verlaine,

have achieved a more complete mastery than was possible for him. Curiously enough, notwithstanding his limitations in technical ability, Baudelaire showed a predilection for the sonnet form, admittedly one of the most difficult of all poetic modes. Nearly half of the poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal* are cast in this form. At the time when Baudelaire was most active, the sonnet was once more coming into vogue in France. But Baudelaire would have been the last to run after the fashion of the day; it would have been contrary to his cult of the new and unusual. But use of the sonnet form would satisfy his cult of the artificial; hence it appealed to him and he gave his reason: "Parce que la forme est contraignante, l'idée jaillit plus intense; tout va bien au sonnet, la bouffonnerie, la galanterie, la passion, la rêverie, la méditation philosophique. Il y a là la beauté du métal ou du minéral travaillés . . ." This explanation is full of Baudelaire's characteristics; his strength of purpose and aim to have expression of corresponding intensity; his pride that what others could do in the befitting expression of passion, revery, meditation, he could; his cult of the artificial, for an object of art made of metal or mineral is most artificial because as the complexity increases, the skill of the artificer becomes the more a prominent element in its expression, so prominent that it is liable to gain all notice. So much for the intention, then, but the artificer once more demonstrates his partial capabilities and his impatience of even self-imposed restraint. In few of his sonnets does Baudelaire follow the Italian type (where the strict rhyme distribution is *abba abba cde cde*); not only does he depart from the traditional order of rhyme, for though the most of the sonnets are in Alexandrine verse, some are written in octosyllabic and decasyllabic measures, and a few are heterometric. Metrical purists, those who put form first, condemned Baudelaire for his metrical heresies; but those who lay stress upon thought-content and development will accept his innovations with tolerance.

As to style and choice of metres, Baudelaire exhibits a happy correspondence between theme and its mode of expression. The Alexandrine is the preponderant measure as befitting the preponderant gravity and soberness of theme. The poet's predilection for polysyllabic words also is in accord with his themes

and his mode of expressing them. Usually the effect is, as Cassagne says, one of fluidity and continuity. And, to quote from Cassagne, "les mots longs sont le plus souvent associés à l'idée de lenteur ou à des idées connexes (langueur, nonchalance, mélancholie, calme, sérénité, indifférence, insensibilité)." And these words of Cassagne, though conveying an idea that might be questionable if applied in general, are undoubtedly correct in the case of Baudelaire. To put it analogically, the melody is developed in a legato way and in slow tempo; the instruments that utter the melody may assume the melancholy timbre of a cello or clarinet or flute or the serenity of the violins or the vainglorious insensibility of brass.

So much for the poetry of Baudelaire. Any discussion of his prose writing is here irrelevant. As a critic he anticipated judgments of the present; he was one of the first to acclaim the genius of Delacroix and of Richard Wagner and in fact of all the great initiators and discoverers of new horizons in the field of art, men who like himself did not heed the trend of the day.

Baudelaire's influence is to be seen in the productions of many of the later French poets. Verlaine's first volume of verse was the work of a disciple. And the verse technique of Verlaine's later characteristic mode at its best owes much of its perfection to Baudelairean initiative. The so-called decadent and symbolist poets look upon Baudelaire as an ancestor. "Ils sont les dignes fils de ce grand et noble poète," says Moréas.

If ever the style was the man, it was in the case of Baudelaire. His style is saturated with his personality, giving it a peculiar flavor as of the exotic perfumes that were his delight. And hence another cause for his limited audience, aside from the peculiar flavor of his poetic content. Whatever one's first impression may be, the abiding judgment of *Les Fleurs du Mal* is that the message is more sincere than a casual reader may think. One gets used to the poet's mannerism, sees beyond his pretence, sees more in his work than an attempt to apply his literary doctrine of art for art's sake, more than a feverish search for novelty in thought and expression. Certainly the world has laid too much emphasis upon the satanic element of Baudelaire's poetry without taking into due account the fact that his immo-

ality is largely the result of the tormenting and violent effort of an intellect impatient of all discipline and of an inner conflict with the conditions prevalent in his time; a conflict which was often expressed in a most cruel and bitter fashion and which is hardly redeemed by artistic excellence. Yet we cannot but feel that Baudelaire's poetry is a spiritual tragedy far more worthy of pity than contempt. Moral indignation on the part of certain criticism that is typically doctrinary in essence and subservient to tradition has so far been somewhat prejudiced and perhaps too exacting in tone and forgetful of the indebtedness of modern French poetry to this great initiator. In the analysis of so complex a personality as that of Baudelaire, one's critical faculties should not be utterly devoid of sympathy nor dimmed by an attitude of systematic opposition that would unconsciously result in a blind condemnation of the poet's art in its entirety. One may discard the questionable truth of the poet's assumption that great art cannot be immoral, but one may reasonably doubt the harmfulness of the immoral element in art when the latter does not convey any intentional aim at corruption. And Baudelaire's immorality is so saturated with the coldness and dejection of pure intellectuality, so odd and lacking in the emotional quality as to be wholly without harmful appeal.

On the other hand, one may deny Baudelaire a high place as a poet on the ground that his work, being so small in bulk and so laboriously produced, shows that his poetic capabilities were wellnigh exhausted in the task, and that his originality is hardly sufficient to offset the poignant narrowness of his poetic vision. All such judgments are evidently based on erroneous assumptions. In fact a limited production does not necessarily exclude genius and depth in one direction, however small in circumference, may be as much a test of genius as a vision sweeping over the largest horizon. In the case of Baudelaire, especially, impartiality of judgment is hard to attain, for the appreciation of the critic is seldom untrammelled by personal inclination and artistic preference; and this explains to a great extent why the poet of *Les Fleurs du Mal* has not yet received his full share of recognition.

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